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ABSTRACT

In response to a state mandate, the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) created an administrative structure, the University Assessment Committee (UAC), to assess the institution's educational merit. Representing the university library was the University Library Assessment Committee (ULAC). The ULAC used two surveys, one for faculty and one for students, to measure their perceptions of the relationship between the library and the curriculum, to assess their attitudes and awareness of library resources and services, and to better determine the levels of bibliographic instruction that are needed for the library's users. Surveys were returned by 240 of the 551 classroom faculty who were mailed forms; 989 students of 1,500 persons using the library on a selected day completed survey forms. As a result of the data analysis, the ULAC's recommendations to the library administration focused on the areas of improved bibliographic instruction, increased awareness of services, and improvement to the library environment. These recommendations were incorporated into the library's planning priorities for the fiscal year. (MAB)

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ASSESSING OUTCOMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN COLORADO: INITIAL LIBRARY PARTICIPATION IN STATE LEGISLATURE MANDATED ASSESSMENT

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Assessing Outcomes of Higher Education in Colorado:

Initial Library Participation in State Legislature Mandated Assessment

In 1985 Colorado's House Bill 1187 CONCERNING THE REORGANIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION was approved as law. Article 13 of the Act relates to higher education accountability whereby institutions are "accountable for demonstrable improvements in student knowledge, capacities and skills between entrance and graduation."[1] The article outlines the various components of the institutional responsibilities to identify goals; to identify activities which advance students toward the goals; and to develop means for evaluating the achievements of students in the targeted areas. The areas of endeavor to which these responsibilities apply include both academic and co-curricular programs. By way of encouraging compliance, the Act provides that the Colorado Commission on Higher Education will withhold an amount not to exceed 2% of the state's institutional appropriation should the institution fail or refuse to implement any part of the accountability program. This punitive authorization commences July 1, 1990.

In response to this legislative mandate the University of Northern Colorado created an administrative structure responsible to the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The University Assessment Committee (UAC), chaired by a faculty member with a half time assignment as Assessment Coordinator, is made up of representatives from the various schools, colleges and co-curricular areas. Numerous representatives from appropriate University committees, leaders of school/college assessment groups, and assorted administrators attend

the sessions lending advice and receiving information necessary to create and coordinate an assessment program for the university.

In May of 1989 in its Assessment Newsletter, the UAC published a list of eleven criteria to be included in the plans for all departments which had not yet submitted documents.[2]

1. How each measure to be used reflects specific objectives of the major, minor, or program of study.
2. The nature of the data that will be obtained from each measuring instrument and how the data will be analyzed and reported.
3. The students to whom the assessment tools will be directed.
4. The schedule of administration of each assessment tool.
5. How feedback about outcomes will be provided to students and other audiences.
6. How the data will be used to improve courses and/or programs of study.
7. The costs of the assessment program.
8. The person(s) responsible for administering, evaluating, and reporting the outcomes of the assessment program to the Dean of the College or to the Director of the Library.
9. How measures used are integrative. Selected measures of student learning must involve synthesis of knowledge, skills, and/or problem-solving strategies which reflect learning obtained from a clearly-identified cluster of courses or across the entire major or minor curriculum.
10. More than one person must be involved in the assessment. Whatever behaviors or products are used to determine the amount and quality of student learning, they must be judged by more than one qualified person, either within or outside the university.
11. No self-report instrument used by students can be used as the sole measure of student learning.

The plans submitted to the Assessment Coordinator are departmental documents representing unique interpretations as to what is expected by way of the assessment of learning outcomes. In basic areas such as writing, speaking, and using the library, numerous departments claimed objectives in the

development of skills. At one point, 11 of 23 departmental plans on file included objectives relating to the development of library skills. The Library faculty and staff support the widely held view that enhancing library skills is a major responsibility shared by the teaching personnel at the university.[3]

The Library Administration's response to the assessment assignment was to create a committee which included representation from a broad spectrum of university interests. The Chair, appointed by the library's director, also serves as the unit representative to the UAC. Members were elected from the library faculty and staff. University faculty members were appointed to represent the Library Advisory Committee, the Graduate Council, the Undergraduate Council, and the Honors Program. Student representation was requested through the student government association. The following charge was received from the library's director:

> The University Libraries Assessment Committee will be a standing committee of the University Libraries assigned to continually assess Library and EMS services, facilities, and access offered to the University Community. The Committee will establish a philosophy of assessment and will create, implement, and evaluate an assessment procedure at least annually. The results will be used by the University Libraries Administrative Staff to analyze and strengthen services provided to students, faculty, and staff.

The University Library Assessment Committee (ULAC) established the goals for the first annual assessment of student outcomes as the

1. enhancement of classroom and research success by students and faculty;

2. enhancement of success in individual pursuit of intellectual, cultural, and social growth;

3. provision of resources, facilities, and services to enable (1) and (2) to occur;

4. provision of instruction in effective accesses to these resources, facilities, and services.

In order to develop the instruments necessary to measure progress toward these goals, the committee's working group of library faculty and staff searched the literature hoping to find user-oriented instruments which might apply to assignment. Through August 1989 there was only one article linking libraries to institutional assessment. It included libraries as a component of a survey of student perceptions regarding campus strengths and weaknesses.[4] In 1988, the Association of Research Libraries published SPEC Kit 148 which contains several survey instruments very similar to those eventually administered at UNC, but it was published after the creation/evaluation of results of the UNC Libraries' two surveys.[5] Ronald R. Powell's paper, "The Relationship of Library User Studies to Performance Measures: A Review of the Literature" was of value in evaluating items found in the literature search.[6]

Since no existing instruments were found which met the Committee's needs, two surveys were developed at UNC. The first was mailed to 551 classroom faculty who have formal settings for evaluating results of library use. It was mailed on October 21, 1988, to be completed and returned by October 31, 1988; 240 surveys were completed and returned. The faculty survey asked whether classes taught were graduate or undergraduate; whether library assignments were made and if so what kind, i.e., reading reserve materials, finding facts, gathering information for reports; and whether the faculty thought certain skills should be mastered at the freshman, junior or graduate levels. These certain skills were in the same areas reported on the student survey in the "were you successful in accomplishing" category. Faculty also were asked to assess the adequacy of their students skills and the adequacy of the library's book and journal collection for under-graduate, graduate, and research use. The goals of the faculty questionnaire were to gain understandings of

1. general library/curriculum relationships as dictated by faculty perceptions of library resources, services and facilities relevant to their library-related class assignments;
2. faculty perception of library skills needed by students at what academic level;
3. faculty attitudes in general toward library resources, services, facilities.

The second survey instrument focused on students. It was administered to persons entering the library on October 24, 1988. Fifteen hundred questionnaires were distributed; 989 were completed and returned. Objectives of the student survey were to gain a base of understanding of library users on a given day and,

1. their awareness of current library resources, services and facilities;
2. their perceived success in using the library;
3. their general attitude toward their uses of the library.

The student survey instrument contained seven demographic questions; seventeen questions asking about the use and awareness of such service tools as reserve, interlibrary loan, and computerized indexes and catalogs; nine questions asking whether users needed or were successful in accomplishing library work using computerized indexes and catalogs, indexes and abstracts, and the UNC Serials List to identify materials on a topic and to find books in the library. Ten miscellaneous questions elicited information about why respondents were in the library on survey day; whether or not they were frequent library users; the types of library work required by professors; how respondents learned to use the library; and how they evaluated the physical components of the library facility - i.e., lighting, noise, temperatures, etc.

The questions on the two surveys were designed to be interpreted individually and/or compared with one another. For example, the students were asked how well they succeeded in using basic indexes and abstracts; faculty were asked at what stage such use/success was required and expected. Demographic questions on the student questionnaire included class status and length of enrollment at UNC which allowed comparison of the two responses. For those questions asking for suggested ways to improve the library environment, the simple number of responses received for each of the ways to improve environmental conditions were accepted as evidence that problems were/were not perceived to exist.

Before finalizing the format of the questionnaire, ULAC members consulted with staff from the University's Computer Center to make certain that the answers could be tabulated and cross-tabulated by computer. This caused last minute stylistic revisions in both questionnaires but no modification of the data elements was required. Subsequent computer reports received by the committee saved untold hours and gave more accurate data than would have been otherwise possible. Further, it allowed for cross-tabulations after the initial results were received. The analysis of the survey data was designed to achieve two goals:

1.) to enable the library to meet the assessment goals and criteria established by the state and by the University; and

2.) to provide management data for the library's administration.

The collection and analysis of the data were not intended to yield conclusions but were rather regarded as initial measures to compare with the results of future studies.

The Committe's recommendations to the Library's administration highlighted problem areas which the Committee felt should receive further study and

more intensive scrutiny. Such phrases as "the Committee recommends further study of," "the Committee recommends exploration of methods to improve," and "the Committee recommends the consideration of" were typical. Improvements in bibliographic instruction, improved publicity to increase awareness of services, and the need for better communication with faculty were suggested. Suggestions to the library's administration included the need for better staff training programs, better signage and the improvement of the study/work environment -- i.e., reduced noise level, better temperature control, and improved lighting.

The disposition of the results of the assessment efforts within the library has been gratifying to the members of ULAC. The Library's administration included recommendations from the report among the library's nine planning priorities for 89-90. The Library's Director was pleased to have the data relating to user needs to use in the long-range planning process.

The Library's successful participation in the University's assessment program has yielded significant support to the library's position within the academic community. The Library's Director is a part of the Dean's Council, the governance group which advises the University's Vice President for Academic Affairs. That Council has watched the assessment process and progress with concern. This is an important institutional undertaking requiring significant amounts of faculty and administrative time, effort, and creativity. The Library's timely and conscientious response to the issues has earned it an equal place among other units which are responsible to help students grow and develop from their university experiences. This initial response by the Libraries coupled with library-related components of departmental assessment activities has given focus to those UNC assessment programs to come.

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